



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850
Phone: 808 541 2749 Fax: 808 541 2756

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Contact: Barbara Maxfield, 808 541 2749 or 349 1409

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Critical Habitat for Molokai Plants Designated by Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a final rule today designating critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act for 41 threatened and endangered plants on the island of Molokai, in accordance with a Federal court order.

The final rule, which becomes effective in 30 days, establishes 88 single-species critical habitat units covering 24,333 acres of land on Molokai. Although identified in separate units by plant species, many of the units actually overlap, creating in essence nine multi-species units. Half of the acreage designated as critical habitat is privately held; the remainder is State land except for three acres under National Park Service jurisdiction.

Based on public comments and new information acquired after critical habitat was proposed in April 2002, the Service eliminated almost 19,200 acres originally proposed for critical habitat status.

The proposed rule was published on April 5, 2002. It identified 43,532 acres on Molokai as potential critical habitat. Based on new information received during the public comment periods or gathered during field visits, areas that do not provide the habitat needed by the species or are not essential for its conservation were eliminated in the final rule.

“Thirty-five of these plant species are found on other Hawaiian islands in addition to Molokai,” said Paul Henson, field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Islands office. “In some cases, we were able to eliminate areas proposed for critical habitat status on this island because better habitat for the plants exists elsewhere.”

“Most scientists seem to agree that a plant species can be considered recovered if we have eight to ten sizeable populations that are naturally reproducing, stable or increasing in numbers, and secure from threats,” Henson added. “In general, we used this recovery goal in identifying critical habitat for each species, though there are some exceptions.”

“We tried to concentrate critical habitat in areas within the State’s Conservation District, where development opportunities are very limited,” said Anne Badgley, Pacific regional director for the Fish and Wildlife Service. “To our knowledge, no plans for development exist within the critical habitat units.”

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Almost 90 percent of the designated critical habitat is within the Conservation District. The remaining portions within the Agricultural District are in arid areas or along steep gulches and ridges where agricultural activities do not occur.

The final critical habitat rule – including maps and a thorough description of the critical habitat units and the plant species they contain – was published in the March 18 edition of the *Federal Register*, which is available at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Web site <http://pacificislands.fws.gov>. Copies of the rule may also be obtained by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Honolulu office at 808/541 3441.

“The final rule includes an addendum to the draft economic analysis previously made available for public review,” said Henson. “With fewer acres designated than originally proposed, the total direct economic costs associated with the plants’ listing and critical habitat designation have been reduced to between \$54,470 and \$269,150 over a 10-year period.”

Critical habitat refers to specific geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and that may require special management considerations. These areas do not have to be occupied by the species at the time of designation. A designation does not set up a preserve or refuge, and only applies to situations where Federal funding or a Federal permit is involved.

In the absence of Federal involvement, the Endangered Species Act does not provide any greater protection to listed plants on private lands than they already receive under State law. The act also does not prohibit “take” of listed plants on private lands, but landowners must still comply with State laws protecting imperiled plants. Landowners who may have these plants on their property are encouraged to contact the State of Hawaii’s Department of Land and Natural Resources for guidance.

Of the 51 plant species found currently or historically on the island of Molokai that are listed as federally threatened or endangered, critical habitat was not designated for 10 species:

- Four of the 10 species are currently found only within the Kamakou, Moomomi, and Pelekunu Preserves on Molokai managed by The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii, and the Service determined the benefits of excluding these areas outweighed the benefits of including them within critical habitat. Henson said the agency believes excluding the preserves will maintain and improve relationships between the Service and The Nature Conservancy. The exclusion is also expected to provide an incentive for other landowners to undertake similar voluntary conservation activities on their lands.
- Four other species no longer occur on the island of Molokai, and the Service was unable to identify habitat that is essential for their conservation on the island.
- Critical habitat was not designated for one species, *Marsilea villosa*, because the Service inadvertently left the area containing its primary constituent elements out of the proposed rule. Critical habitat for this species will be considered at a later time.

- The Service determined that designating critical habitat for one species of Hawaiian loulu or palm, *Pritchardia munroi*, would not be prudent in order to reduce the risk of vandalism or collection to the species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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Note to Editors: JPEG photos of a few of these plant species are available by calling Sandy Hall in the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office at 808 541 2749.